CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 23 January 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Sun (Republic of Korea)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 752nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of France, Austria, Germany, Egypt, Bangladesh and Belgium.

I should like to welcome the new representative of Mongolia, Ambassador Bold, and as usual assure him of our cooperation and support.

Before giving the floor to those inscribed today, I should like to inform you that further requests have been received from Nepal and Armenia, States not members of the Conference, for participation in our work during 1997. With your agreement, I should like to take a decision on these requests without considering them first at an informal meeting. It would be my intention to take them up at the end of this plenary meeting.

I now give the floor to the representative of France, Ambassador Bourgois.

Mrs. BOURGOIS (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me as the year begins to extend to you my best wishes for success. The international community is counting on you. Let me assure you of the complete cooperation of my country and my delegation.

We are entering a year which will be a turning-point. The year which has just ended was a year of harvests. In the area of nuclear disarmament, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, a treaty drawn up by this Conference, was opened for signature on 24 September 1996. A diplomatic exercise which began more than 40 years ago was thus brought to a conclusion. The exceptional procedure which made this result possible emphasized the extent to which the CTBT negotiations were no ordinary negotiations. They were imbued with such contradictory expectations and symbolism that the fate of President Ramaker's text appeared, if not more important than that of the Conference on Disarmament itself, at least closely linked with the credibility and even the survival of this institution. What would have happened to the Conference if it had failed? But success was achieved. With 139 signatories already, including 41 of the 44 States whose ratification is necessary, we are entitled to hope that the entry into force of the treaty is not an unrealistic dream.

The year now beginning must be a year for fresh sowing. The Conference on Disarmament is once again at a crossroads, as in 1993, after the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The first task that we must tackle is that of determining which road to take.

Mr. President, since you took up the Chair of our institution you have carried out consultations on what the content of a new agenda for the Conference on Disarmament might be. You have presented us with the initial outlines around which your ideas are organized. I can only encourage you to go further. It seems to me that the idea you have adopted of drawing up a list of subjects derived from our programme of action which could guide us

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

this year should be decided on rapidly in the light of the consultations which you have conducted. If you believe that an agreement can emerge and that some topics can be the subject of genuine negotiations, then you must move forward as soon as possible. However, the cautious conclusions of your predecessor, President Dembinski, to whom I would also like to pay tribute here, mean that we must also consider the possibility that agreement may not be reached or may take some time to materialize. Perhaps in that case you might consider speedily adopting the solution which over the past two years has enabled us to agree on the launching of concrete negotiations while respecting everyone's point of view: you could, while leaving pending agreement by the Conference on its agenda, note that no one is opposed to establishing one or several ad hoc committees with specific tasks, in other words, negotiating mandates.

My country is well aware of the positions of the various sides, and we respect them. But we do not a priori consider them irreconcilable, because this year the Conference is not starting from scratch. At a time when we have to choose which road to take, we must consider how we can make the best use of the lessons we have learned. What are these lessons? And what are the elements of consensus or quasi-consensus which should inspire our proceedings?

In the nuclear area, if we consider the United Nations General Assembly, the venue for the highest expression of international public opinion, I must note that in 1993, in resolution 48/75 L, the Assembly recommended by consensus the negotiation in the most appropriate forum of a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. In March 1995, prompted by Ambassador Shannon, the delegations of the Conference on Disarmament laid down the mandate of the ad hoc committee to negotiate a treaty on the basis of that resolution. In May 1995, that commitment to draw up a universal treaty was taken up formally in the section devoted to nuclear disarmament in the declaration of principles and objectives subscribed to by the 185 members of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

As you know, France has already taken a number of steps at the national level in this area. As of 1992 my country stopped producing weapons-grade plutonium at Marcoule, and stopped producing highly enriched uranium at Pierrelatte in 1996. Furthermore, in 1996 the President of the Republic announced that those two plants would be closed. France no longer produces fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. With the closures at the Plateau d'Albion and Mururoa and the reductions I have just referred to, France has made a unique effort towards nuclear disarmament, an effort which is consistent with deterrence based on strict sufficiency. My country has therefore unilaterally made irreversible commitments which must facilitate the success of the negotiations on the "cut-off" treaty. We expect as much from countries which have not yet made such commitments, or not on such a scale.

Only a treaty negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament, as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was, can confer on these commitments the universality which is an essential element to enable the international community to make progress towards nuclear disarmament. Such a treaty will

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put an end to any possibility of a quantitative resumption of the nuclear arms race, just as the CTBT has put an end to the possibility of a qualitative resumption by making it impossible to develop new types of nuclear weapons which are even more sophisticated. It will impose new constraints on the nuclear-weapon States and any other States which may possess weapons-grade fissile material, and will thus effectively promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all its aspects. Negotiations on the treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices will require a great deal of work because it will be necessary to address the delicate issue of the scope of the treaty, arrangements for verifying compliance with each party's obligations and also implementation. The verification provisions will, if they are properly negotiated, be able to introduce a note of trust which is fundamental in relations among States, both nuclear and non-nuclear, whether or not they have signed the NPT.

To summarize, my country remains convinced, as others are, including our friends from the Non-Aligned group, that because of their importance, nuclear issues must remain at the centre of our Conference's attention. If negotiations are able to begin on the "cut-off", France will do what it can to promote their rapid initiation and speedy conclusion. On the other hand, however, the idea of embarking on a road leading to the setting up of an ad hoc committee entrusted with all the issues of nuclear disarmament is triply problematical for us, or at least raises some questions in our minds. First of all, with regard to procedure, as we are only too aware, and as we hear every day, this is a time for saving money, and it would not be in the interest of the Conference to set up a mechanism, committee or any other arrangement which lacked a precise negotiating mandate and would be limited to disputatious discussions of generalities. The Conference on Disarmament is not a local pub or bar: it should not duplicate the discussions in the First Committee, it should not overlap with the Disarmament Commission. Although there are some who hold the opposite view, this is an automatic corrollary of its restricted membership.

Secondly, with regard to the substance, there is a very clear logic in making the "cut-off" the second set of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation after the CTBT. If we consider other measures which might be proposed, I cannot see any which has any real meaning, in a gradual and step-by-step process, as long as the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons continues. My country can see in advance that the "cut-off" negotiations presuppose the imposition of new restrictions, new restrictions on non-nuclear-weapon States, whether or not they are parties to the NPT; new restrictions too on the States which have nuclear weapons. Today these are the only type of negotiations which can produce results in both disarmament and non-proliferation.

Lastly, from a practical point of view, we need results. Trying to evade the "cut-off" negotiations, which constitute an essential stage, would mean remaining at the stage of declamatory phrases or placing oneself in the final perspective of nuclear disarmament in the framework of general and complete disarmament: in either case, no concrete progress can be expected in the near future.

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

France is well aware of the difficulty of reaching an agreement and the fact that the negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material will be long and complex. We know that 185 countries have committed themselves here to implementing the Shannon mandate, agreed two years ago, and beginning the negotiations on a "cut-off", without any conditions and without any linkage to any other measures, but we are also aware that two or three partners are not ready to do so. We do not hope to force them to do so. However, we do hope to convince them to do so.

It also falls to this Conference to consider the second facet of its mission, the conventional facet. The preliminary work for holding a possible fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly on disarmament have indicated that this is of equal priority in the view of the international community. In this field as well the Conference is not starting from scratch, and here again measures taken at the national level by some countries, including my own, have pointed the way to go. Since our last meetings last September, France has taken major steps to combat the scourge of anti-personnel mines. On 2 October 1996 the Council of Ministers decided that France would renounce the use of anti-personnel mines. This non-use rule allows of no geographical exceptions. It applies to all categories of anti-personnel mines. The only derogation provided for is extremely limited and concerns cases of absolute necessity relating to force security with the express authorization of the Government. France is thus the first permanent member of the Security Council to adopt such a firm position on the use of anti-personnel mines. Furthermore, the decisions to abandon the export and production of anti-personnel mines, which were reached in 1993 and 1995 respectively, will be covered by a bill which is soon to be submitted to Parliament. The programme of reduction of the anti-personnel mine stockpile by destruction undertaken in September 1996 will be continued. These decisions are consistent with the objectives set by the President of the Republic of mobilizing the international community to a greater degree to make progress towards a total and comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines. You are also aware that on 1 October 1996 the European Union took joint action on anti-personnel mines and decided to combat and put an end to the indiscriminate use of these weapons and their proliferation throughout the world, thereby contributing to resolving the problems which they cause, have caused and will cause.

The international community as a whole has taken a stand on this subject, in a virtually consensual manner, in endorsing the objective of a total ban on anti-personnel mines by a very large majority with no negative votes in United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/45 L. As you know, France supported that text. But you are aware that we also want the resolution not to remain purely declamatory but to contain practical instructions - an explicit mandate given to the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate such an agreement. During the discussions in the First Committee, we noted that our ideas on this matter were increasingly understood and even shared. The decision taken by President Clinton on 17 January 1997 to a certain extent rewards our efforts and those of other countries which shared our ideas: we welcome that decision with particular satisfaction.

(Mrs. Bourgois, France)

The establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate a treaty for the total prohibition of anti-personnel mines is facing four difficulties today. First, some claim that anti-personnel mines are a humanitarian issue which does not really fall in the Conference's purview. Personally I would prefer to note that the question of mines certainly does have a humanitarian aspect: combating the indiscriminate use of mines. As such the modified Protocol II on prohibitions or restrictions on the use of mines and other devices was negotiated and adopted on 3 May 1996: from the humanitarian point of view we should work to make it universal. But the question of mines contains also, and above all, the dimension of disarmament. Because mines are weapons, and as such for many countries they constitute one of the important components of their defence, an element of local or regional balance. Hence a comprehensive ban on this type of weapon by its very nature comes under the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament, which, I would remind you, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously and by consensus has reaffirmed to be the sole multilateral negotiating forum in the field of disarmament.

Secondly, other States, sometimes the same ones as those I have just referred to, consider that the Conference on Disarmament would not be able to tackle two parallel sets of negotiations. Agreeing on mines would mean abandoning efforts to make progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I think this concern is excessive. Last year we were able to complete Protocol II and the CTBT in parallel. There is no reason why, if an agreement emerges in the nuclear field, we should not try to progress on both fronts. In any event France does not intend to hide behind mines in order to evade a discussion of the nuclear issue, which, with the "cut-off", remains a major priority.

Thirdly, other countries have expressed reservations concerning the very objective of a global ban on anti-personnel mines. In their view we should concentrate on the universality and the implementation of Protocol II. The task suggested to us by the United Nations General Assembly cannot be reduced to that objective. By coming out in favour of a total ban, we have opted for negotiations on an entirely new disarmament treaty. We must of course proceed with the requisite realism, and that involves adopting a phased approach. We must seek progressive, step-by-step agreement, with measures negotiated one after the other, leading gradually to a total ban. A ban on transfers should constitute the first stage, and that stage is certainly within our grasp.

Fourthly, others hesitate to take this path and are tempted by a different approach which would involve very rapid agreement among countries which have already renounced mines on the text of a total ban on these weapons, outside the Conference. Although we certainly recognize the political utility of all efforts aimed at facilitating the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, I must say that this approach would lose interest for us as soon as it left the political field and sought to pose as an alternative to the work of the Conference on Disarmament. This procedure would seem to us to be doomed to be ineffective, in a certain way: we do not need to hold discussions with the countries which have already renounced mines, we have to negotiate with those which produce, use and stockpile mines, if we want to reduce the number of deaths and avoid the appearance of new Cambodias.

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Somalias, Angolas or Bosnias. After all, the advocates of that approach themselves admit that their proposal is not based on negotiations: at the very most they envisage consultations. We, on the other hand, prefer an effective treaty, even if it takes longer to achieve, rather than a rapid agreement which wouldn't really change the situation on the ground. Effectiveness presupposes in particular that provision should be made for verification, as pointed out by France and 45 States which signed the Ouagadougou declaration on 6 December 1996. Only the Conference on Disarmament has the necessary expertise to meet that challenge.

In the context which I have just outlined, my country believes that the best chance we have here today to begin work which can produce rapid and concrete results which are understandable and expected by the entire international community lies in establishing as soon as possible an ad hoc committee to negotiate a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines by means of a step-by-step approach. In that committee, day after day, because it will be a standing committee, because everyone will be there, or will have an opportunity to be there, we will be able to work towards bringing our views closer together, reducing the divergences between us, and finally producing, developing, a concrete product. Today France has the honour to propose to the Conference on Disarmament that such a committee be established.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of France for her statement and for the kind words addressed to me. I now give the floor to the representative of Austria, Ambassador Freid.

Mr. FREID (Austria): At the outset, Mr. President, our congratulations and best wishes to you, and be assured that we will do our best to make your task easier.

I am taking the floor today above all in order to provide to this Conference some information on the expert meeting on anti-personnel landmines which my Government will be hosting in Vienna from 12 to 14 February. Most of you are doubtless already aware of this initiative, since official invitations to this meeting have been sent to Governments last week. Given the sensitivity of the subject under consideration, we thought it appropriate to explain in the context of the CD the exact terms of reference and to explain Austria's motives for inviting to this meeting.

In view of the widespread and unwarranted suffering caused by the use of anti-personnel landmines the Austrian Government was motivated to act, both at the national and the international levels, in order to come to terms, once and for all, with this scourge. Thus, the Austrian Parliament has recently passed a law which bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of such mines in our country, where existing stockpiles had already been destroyed in 1995. If I am correctly informed, Austria is thus the first country to have taken this far-reaching step of legally banning APMs for good, but we know that other countries are about to follow suit and can only encourage all of you to consider appropriate similar action.

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

We will circulate the text of the Austrian Federal Law as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

Yet my Government is also fully persuaded that lasting success cannot be achieved through spontaneous and isolated action, well intended as it may be. In view of the very limited progress achieved at the Review Conference on the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons last year, Austria sees the urgent need for a separate effective legally binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. At the Conference in Ottawa last October it became manifest that the size and regional diversity of the States sharing this view had reached the critical mass necessary for negotiations on such a convention and their early conclusion. Convinced of the feasibility of drafting such a text, Austria prepared a first tentative draft which met with considerable interest at the Ottawa Conference. Consequently, the Chairman of that meeting, the Canadian Foreign Minister, tasked Austria to present a draft at the Brussels Follow-up Meeting in June 1997.

Why is Austria hosting the Expert Meeting on the text of a convention to ban APLMs? Austria was encouraged to do so by the overwhelming support for United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/45 S. One hundred and fifty-five States voted in favour of the explicit call in operative paragraph 1 to "pursue vigorously an effective, legally binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of [APMs] with a view to completing the negotiation as soon as possible".

We felt the urgency of the matter - and that means life or death or being maimed for 25,000 people a year - does not allow us to sit with crossed arms until every organizational and procedural detail for future negotiations is hammered out. We felt we could win precious time - and save human lives - if informal open discussions of what a convention might look like started already now. We thought a first tentative draft would be helpful to induce such discussions. While we do not start the real negotiations in Vienna, we will try to help to prepare them. We hope that all States represented in this room and many more will be present in Vienna and will actively contribute in the discussion. The responses received so far have been very encouraging. We have seen that there is interest for the meeting exceeding our own expectations. Already now, it is foreseeable that more countries will participate in Vienna than there are members in the CD. We seek in particular the input of mine-affected countries.

While it is well known that Austria is a staunch supporter of the Ottawa Process, let me state very clearly that the meeting in Vienna in no way prejudges the position of the participating countries on the form and the forum in which the negotiations are to be conducted. Austria does not even intend to discuss this issue in Vienna. Regardless of the forum in which the actual negotiations will be held, previous informal discussions on the text of a convention and a draft presented as a national paper but taking into account many comments received thereon will be useful.

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

Attached to my statement you will find an information sheet which resumes the key aspects of the Vienna meeting. It is foreseen to begin with an exchange of views on the key elements of a future convention. During this initial discussion, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines will be allowed to participate. After this, only the representatives of States and the United Nations as well as ICRC will proceed to an article-by-article review of the draft proposed by Austria. The informal and expert character of the meeting is underlined by the fact that no report will be adopted or any decision taken. On the basis of the comments received in the exchange of views, Austria will produce a revision of the draft, which will once again be distributed. Depending on the progress made at this first meeting, a second meeting will most probably be required in late May in order to elaborate further on the text which then would be presented by Austria as a national draft without prejudging the position of other countries at the June 1997 meeting in Belgium.

Let me reiterate the invitation by Austria to all States interested in the above-mentioned expert meeting. The Austrian Mission in Geneva is at delegations' disposal for any further information they might request. Austria is looking forward to the widest possible participation at this meeting and to your contributions to the text of an anti-personnel landmines convention.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Austria for his statement, and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, Ambassador Hoffmann.

Mr. HOFFMANN (Germany): I would like to congratulate you most sincerely, Sir, upon your assumption of the responsible task of being this year's first President. We are fully aware that the first President of any CD session carries a special responsibility for bringing the Conference to an early start of meaningful and substantive work. This year, the burden of your office is especially heavy as, after the end of the CTBT negotiations, far-reaching decisions must be made which concern not only this year's session of the CD but will quite probably set the course for the CD in the years to come. I want to assure you of the full cooperation and support of the German delegation in bringing about a fruitful beginning of this CD session.

I also would like to pay tribute to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Secretary-General's Personal Representative, and to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, for the professional services they have been providing for the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me also welcome our new colleagues. I look forward to their invigorating support for our efforts.

I want, in particular, to thank you for the considerable effort you have made to arrive at an early agreement on the agenda for this session, as well as Mr. Petrovsky for his valuable contribution to this discussion. You have suggested an agenda which reflects very well the areas of priority which in the German view should be treated by the CD, and which addresses in a

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well-balanced way the two broad items of conventional and non-conventional disarmament. While nuclear disarmament remains one of the top priorities of this Conference, conventional disarmament and arms control must be addressed in greater depth in view of the large number of conventional armed conflicts and the tremendous suffering created by conventional weapons in many parts of the world. I welcome the fact that your agenda proposal contains those topics on which considerable discussions have taken place in the past, such as transparency in armaments and negative security assurances, and on which substantial work could be continued without undue delay. In my view, it should be possible on the basis of this proposed agenda to reach early agreement on a substantive work programme for the CD.

The United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on 10 September 1996 to open the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty for signature. Thus, the negotiations which the Conference on Disarmament had pursued with determination and vigour over the last years reached a successful conclusion. The CTBT aims at ending the development of ever more sophisticated and qualitatively new nuclear weapons. Properly monitored and enforced, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty will end the qualitative arms race and encourage much deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals than have been attempted thus far. It constitutes therefore not only an important contribution to horizontal and vertical non-proliferation but also, in the long run, towards nuclear disarmament.

By mid-January 1997 the number of CTBT States signatories reached 138. These States decided to bridge the period till entry into force of the Treaty by cooperating in the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO in order "to ensure the operationalization of the Treaty's verification regime at entry into force", as it says in paragraph 13 of the "Text on the establishment of the Preparatory Commission". Germany is fully committed to this process and appeals to all States signatories to contribute constructively to an early start of the provisional secretariat's work and to all States to promote the early entry into force of the CTBT through timely ratification.

The agenda you have proposed contains two items to which Germany attaches particular priority. These two items are a "cut-off" of fissile material for nuclear weapons and a ban on anti-personnel mines. In our view, the time is ripe for the CD to start immediately substantive negotiation processes on these two subjects.

When the Non-Proliferation Treaty was extended indefinitely, it was further qualitatively strengthened by the decisions on "Strengthening the review process for the Treaty" and on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament". The "Principles and objectives" make a significant contribution to some of the main areas of concern to the Conference on Disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament and security assurances. The first step of the programme of action laid down in the "Principles and objectives" under the heading of nuclear disarmament, the negotiation of a nuclear-test-ban treaty, has been taken.

(Mr. Hoffmann, Germany)

The second step should be a "cut-off" of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. The objective of such a multilateral and effectively verifiable "cut-off" treaty would be to cap the amount of fissile material available for nuclear weapons. Such a treaty would be a necessary complement to the CTBT.

Nations have long sought such a "cut-off" treaty. In 1993, the forty-eighth United Nations General Assembly finally adopted unanimously resolution 48/75 L calling for "cut-off" negotiations. Two years later - after many months of consultations and based on the valuable work of Canadian Ambassador Shannon - we achieved consensus in the CD on a mandate to negotiate the treaty called for in the resolution. The basis for "cut-off" negotiations being firmly laid, there is no justification in further delaying the establishment of the respective ad hoc committee.

The German Government attaches high priority to the immediate commencement of negotiations on such a convention as a further important contribution towards non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In April 1996, Germany unconditionally renounced the use of anti-personnel mines. Existing stocks will be destroyed by the end of this year. In July 1996 the German Foreign Minister announced a seven-point action programme on anti-personnel mines. Its prime objective is an international ban on such mines. We must once and for all eradicate this cruel and inhumane weapon. This is why Germany strongly welcomes similar steps taken by a growing number of States as well as the widespread and still increasing support for a total ban within the international community. The joint action by the European Union, the Ottawa Declaration and, last but not least, the overwhelming support for the fifty-first United Nations General Assembly's resolution to ban anti-personnel mines are proof of this development. In this context, I wholeheartedly welcome the statement by Ambassador Kreid of Austria.

I would like to congratulate the Canadian Government on their initiative to create a global movement of like-minded States committed to a total ban on anti-personnel mines. The momentum of this process, which is fully compatible with other initiatives to pursue a total ban, has to be maintained and further developed. Considering its global approach, the number of participating States should be as high as possible.

The German Government is committed to the early conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel mines. It should be total in scope and - as to adherence - as global as possible. Germany is decided to work towards this objective by all effective means and in any appropriate forum. Having said this, it is, however, our view that the universal role of the CD and the expertise and experience accumulated over many years in this negotiating institution should be fully made use of in concluding a total ban on anti-personnel mines. We should, therefore, immediately begin discussions in the CD on how best to achieve this goal as proposed by a significant number of States, including recently the United States of America. In our view it is crucial that any negotiating

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mandate agreed upon should stipulate a clear obligation to reach a total ban. It should equally outline which concrete steps should be taken to reach this objective and when.

A universal and legally binding ban on anti-personnel mines is not only a matter of humanitarian concern and urgency but also - aiming at the elimination of an entire category of weapons - an important international arms control issue. Given the CD's unique role in negotiating universal arms control agreements, its failure to reach agreement on an issue as important as anti-personnel mines would not only disappoint the international community. It could also raise questions about the effectiveness of the Conference itself and put its future role at serious risk from emerging alternative procedures.

The CD has in the past successfully negotiated treaties on the total elimination of certain categories of weapons of mass destruction. Germany strongly welcomes the fact that one of these treaties, the CWC, will shortly enter into force, and hopes that as many countries as possible will have ratified that Convention by that date, especially those countries with declared capacities in this area.

While the CWC contains an elaborate verification regime, the first disarmament agreement to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, the BTWC, lacks such provisions. Even though there has been progress in the Ad Hoc Group of member States on verification measures, there is a clear need to speed up the negotiations. In this context, we welcome the decision adopted by the Ad Hoc Group in September 1996 to allocate more time to the BTWC, as well as the relevant part of the Final Document of the Fourth Review Conference encouraging the Ad Hoc Group to review its method of work and to move to a negotiating format. Germany would like to see the negotiations on a verification protocol completed by mid-1998.

The expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament remains a pending question. While we welcome the decision adopted by the CD in June last year to expand its membership by 23 States, we believe that the other States that have applied for membership can also make valuable contributions to our work. The German position has consistently been that all States wishing to participate in the CD as full members should have the right to do so. We support, therefore, the appointment of a Special Coordinator entrusted with the task of solving the issue of further CD expansion in a timely manner. In this context, I would like to recall the overwhelming support the United Nations resolution on CD enlargement received last year.

The growing number of States wishing to participate in the work of this Conference testifies to the great importance attached to our work by the international community. It is up to us to respond to these high expectations by reaching early agreement on a programme of work that reflects the aspirations and preoccupations of the countries and of the peoples of our planet. This is a difficult task, but we must and we can succeed in this task.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the German Ambassador for his statement, and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt, Ambassador Zahran.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to express to you the congratulations of the Egyptian delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and our support for the consultations that you are conducting, in an active and competent manner, on the agenda of the Conference even though your country, the Republic of Korea, only joined the Conference on Disarmament a few months ago. I would also like to express my delegation's sincere gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Ludwik Dembinski of Poland, who guided the work of the Conference admirably throughout the final part of our 1996 session, and for the consultations he conducted during the inter-sessional period.

I wish to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues who have recently joined us at the Conference on Disarmament, namely Ambassador Mohamed Salah Dembri of Algeria, Ambassador John Campbell of Australia, Ambassador Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury of Bangladesh, Ambassador André Mernier of Belgium and Ambassador Bold of Mongolia. I look forward to cooperating closely with all of them in the future.

I would also like to express appreciation for the efforts and the constructive proposals that have been made by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference and the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in order to facilitate the initial work of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to thank Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail and the members of the secretariat for all the efforts they are making to assist the Conference in its work.

I have asked for the floor today to make a few observations about the work of the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to begin with an issue of the utmost importance to the non-nuclear-weapon States including Egypt, namely the question of nuclear disarmament. However, before doing so, I would like to recall that the year 1996 witnessed two very important events in the field of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. The first was the signing at Cairo of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty as a testimony to the developing countries' commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament worldwide and also as a positive and encouraging step which should be followed soon by the negotiation of the establishment of another zone in the Middle East in conformity with the relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions and as a step towards the implementation of President Mubarak's proposal concerning the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. These steps should promote the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. In this respect, we welcome the agreement recently reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron as a new phase in the implementation of the Madrid peace process and the Oslo Agreement.

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

The second event was the adoption of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a step, limited as it may be, towards nuclear disarmament. The importance of these two events cannot be overlooked and the message that they carry at the regional and international levels should motivate the international community to pursue the objective of nuclear disarmament and should give further impetus to the efforts aimed at achieving the universality of all international instruments relating to disarmament.

The issue of nuclear disarmment has been on the disarmament agenda for several decades. The international community has already dealt with biological and chemical weapons, which are now banned under the Biological Weapons Convention, which unfortunately lacks a verification regime, and the Chemical Weapons Convention, which will enter into force soon, unfortunately without the ratification of the countries which have the greatest stockpiles of these weapons. However, the most serious exception remains that of nuclear weapons, which are unquestionably the most devastating and destructive of all weapons. Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty called for negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament. That was in 1968, and this objective has not yet been achieved. The 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference agreed to extend that Treaty indefinitely, but without being able to proceed to a review of the implementation of article VI nor to agree on a binding time schedule for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We recongize that two nuclear-weapon States, namely the United States of America and the Russian Federation, have indeed made important bilateral achievements in this field, but we cannot deny that the nuclear-weapon States have yet to commit themselves to a clear time schedule for nuclear disarmament in order to fulfil their commitment to this so-called ultimate objective of nuclear disarmament referred to in article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The declarations, action plans, final documents, resolutions and recommendations calling for nuclear disarmament which have been adopted at the United Nations and other international forums, including the Non-Aligned Movement, could fill volumes. However, notwithstanding the will of the majority of members of the international community, nuclear disarmament is progressing at a very slow pace without a clear legally binding commitment to a specific time-frame for the achievement of complete nuclear diarmament. Such a situation might give the impression that those countries possessing nuclear weapons still believe that these weapons have a role to play in international relations. Experts in international law view this situation as a threat to international peace and security and a violation of fundamental human rights, particularly the right to life of present and future generations.

The immense destructive power of nuclear weapons was clearly behind the warning message highlighted in the report of the Canberra Commission of August 1996. Its central message was that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence was militarily redundant and dangerous. Furthermore, the report stated, and I quote:

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

(continued in English)

"A central reality is that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all States. Indeed, States which possess them become themselves targets of nuclear weapons. The opportunity now exists, perhaps without precedent or recurrence, to make a new and clear choice to enable the world to conduct its affairs without nuclear weapons." "A nuclear-weapon-free world can be secured and maintained through political commitment, and anchored in an enduring and binding legal framework."

(continued in Arabic)

Is it true that there are a number of forums which address nuclear issues, in particular the Conference on Disarmament, which is the sole negotiating forum on disarmament questions, and the General Assembly of the United Nations. However, these issues are not being approached in a comprehensive and conclusive manner and, consequently, the security assurances for the non-nuclear-weapon States provided, jointly and separately, by the nuclear-weapon States, which were reflected in Security Council resolution 984 (1995) still fall short of our expectations since they are conditional, non-comprehensive and not legally binding and have not been negotiated multilaterally. Therefore, the decision on "Principles and objectives" adopted by the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference in May 1995 should be implemented by beginning serious negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a multilateral and legally binding instrument to provide non-nuclear-weapon States with comprehensive security assurances as soon as possible. Furthermore, in this connection I would like to refer to General Assembly resolution 51/43 which recommended that the Conference on Disarmament should actively continue intensive negotiations with a view to reaching early agreement and concluding effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

The issue of a ban on the production of fissile materials is another case in point. We believe that a ban on the production of fissile materials, should not disregard the past production of those materials, which is commonly referred to as stockpiles, because that would be only a limited measure constituting a partial solution to non-proliferation and could not be considered as a further step towards nuclear disarmament. On this basis therefore, and in conformity with the terms of reference established by Ambassador Shannon the Special Coordinator on this matter, we could begin to negotiate a convention on the prohibition of the production of fissile materials in a committee on nuclear disarmament which the Group of 21 has requested to be established in the CD, because we are considering this question as one of the measures forming part of the nuclear disarmament programme contained in the "Principles and objectives" that were adopted by the NPT Review Conference.

I do not wish to enumerate yet again the very numerous instances in which calls for nuclear disarmament have been made by the international community, I do, however, wish to make reference to General Assembly

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

resolution 51/45 O, which called upon the Conference on Disarmament to establish, on a priority basis, an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to start negotiations early in 1997 on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament with a view to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework through a nuclear weapons convention.

In this context I would like to refer to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice issued on 8 July 1996 which unanimously recognized that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. Resolution 51/45 M adopted by the General Assembly called upon all States to fulfil that obligation immediately by commencing multilateral negotiations in 1997 leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention. This should be reflected within the context of the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating forum dealing with questions of disarmament. In addition, it is worth noting that the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted resolution 1996/14 on 23 August 1996 and contained in document CD/1433 which stipulates in its operative paragraphs the following:

(continued in English)

> "[The Sub-Commission] affirms that weapons of mass destruction and in particular nuclear weapons should have no role to play in international relations and thus should be eliminated;
>
> "Recommends that the relevant international forums, in particular the Conference on Disarmament should immediately start negotiations on nuclear disarmament to reduce nuclear weapons globally within a phased programme, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons, thus contributing to the enhancement of international peace and security and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and above all the right to life."

(continued in Arabic)

The programme of action for the elimination of nuclear weapons which Egypt submitted to the Conference on Disarmament on 8 August 1996 on behalf of 28 delegations which are members of the Group of 21 in the Conference on Disarmament (CD/1419) constitutes an additional contribution that will help to start negotiations in the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament that we requested to be established by the Conference on Disarmament. This programme of action recognizes that there is a requirement for active multilateral efforts to identify, negotiate and implement specific step-by-step measures for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons at both the regional and international levels. This programme contains concrete measures to be carried out by the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament in three phases, the last of which takes us to the year 2020. The list of measures proposed is not

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

exhaustive but it is understood that, in any programme for nuclear disarmament, all measures to be taken are inextricably bound to one another.

Since this statement concentrates on nuclear issues, to which the highest priority must be accorded, I do not wish to repeat extensively our position on the non-nuclear issues to be included on our provisional agenda. Let me only state that we continue to attach great importance to issues such as the prevention of an arms race in outer space because we are of the opinion that any military activities in this sphere should be categorically banned. In this connection, I would like to refer to resolution 51/44 introduced by Egypt and adopted by the General Assembly and which called upon all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to contribute actively to the objective of the peaceful use of outer space and of the prevention of an arms race in outer space and to refrain from any actions contrary to that objective. The resolution also requested the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space with a negotiating mandate at the beginning of its 1997 session with a view to conducting negotiations for the conclusion of an agreement to prevent an arms race in outer space in all its aspects.

We turn now to the issue of transparency in armaments, which must be dealt with comprehensively in such a way as to cover all kinds of armaments, be they conventional arms or weapons of mass destruction. In that case transparency would serve as an early warning mechanism in the event of the accumulation of all kinds of arms in any country, thus threatening international peace and security. Moreover, Egypt stressed the need for certain basic requirements to be fulfilled if the United Nations Register is to become a truly significant confidence-building measure and thereby contribute to enhancing security and stability. These requirements are: confidence-building measures have to be universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory; they must ensure equal rights and obligations for all States; they must address the legitimate security concerns of all States. In this respect we should retain on the agenda of the 1997 session two important items which were included in previous CD agendas, namely, new types of weapons of mass destruction, making reference here to radiological weapons according to United Nations General Assembly resolution 51/37, and the comprehensive programme of disarmament.

Mr. President, those are some comments on the proposal that you yourself have submitted for the provisional agenda of the Conference on Disarmament.

Turning now to the proposed prohibition of anti-personnel landmines, I would like to stress the fact that Egypt is among the countries that have suffered most from landmines. About 23 million landmines were planted in our soil by foreign Powers during the Second World War and regional conflicts. In addition to the citizens who are being being killed and maimed in Egypt every year as a result of those mines, the existing minefields, especially in the area of the Western Desert, continue to hamper the economic and human development efforts in this vast area of our country. Hence the elimination and clearance of those mines is a matter of high priority to Egypt and those foreign Powers which planted them should bear the full cost of their

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

clearance. Egypt is aware of the magnitude and severity of the problems related to the proliferation of anti-personnel landmines, which is above all a humanitarian issue given the suffering they inflict on civilian populations, the heavy financial burden and the limited nature of the technology used in the detection and deactivation of these mines. However, we believe that measures aimed at the prohibition of landmines should be accompanied by serious and concrete steps geared, towards mine clearance from affected countries, in particular those countries which are unable to achieve this objective on their own. This could be done by meeting the technical and financial requirements for the achievement of that objective. In this connection, useful reference might be made to the final declaration of the CCW Review Conference held in Geneva in 1996 which contained a paragraph on the role of States involved in the deployment of mines in the process of their clearance, and I quote:

(continued in English)

> "Recognizing the important role that the international community, particularly States involved in the deployment of mines, can play in assisting in mine clearance in affected countries through the provision of necessary maps and information and appropriate technical and material assistance to remove or otherwise render ineffective existing minefields, mines and booby traps ...".

(continued in Arabic)

Moreover, we believe that, in our efforts to limit the proliferation of landmines, we should take into consideration the national security concerns of States and their legitimate right of self-defence enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly in the case of States with long borders passing through uninhabited areas which are also the areas in which illicit smuggling of drugs and weapons takes place with a view to undermining national stability and security and encouraging terrorist and criminal activities across the borders.

The question arises as to who should bear the cost of finding an alternative to the mines that have been planted to defend borders, especially in developing countries. This question must be addressed frankly and fairly by the proponents of the proposal banning anti-personnel landmines before we negotiate a treaty. At all events, this issue should not overshadow the question of nuclear disarmament to which we and the internatioal community attach top priority in conformity with the outcome of the special General Assembly session on disarmament, SSOD-I, and other relevant resolutions.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of promoting and strengthening the competence of the United Nation in the field of disarmament. This joint objective requires coordination between the work of the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission with a view to supplementing international efforts to achieve general and complete disarmament. In the light of past experience, we call upon all States to

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

cooperate in good faith in the implementation of all the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly concerning the work of the Conference on Disarmament in order to ensure respect for international law and democratic relations.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Zahran for his statement and kind remarks addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh, Ambassador Chowdhury.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh): The Bangladesh delegation felicitates you, Sir, upon the assumption of the presidency. That you undertake these onerous responsibilities so soon after the Republic of Korea's joining the CD reflects your own and your country's commitments to our goals. This warrants praise. Bangladesh, too, is new in the CD. We are not, however, new in our dedication to its purposes. We hope our contribution would attest to it. I thank all who have welcomed me, and other newcomers, so warmly today. We appear to have come at an opportune moment just as the Conference is looking at the organization of its work for the year ahead.

In some ways the CD, as our French colleague has said, is at a crossroads. The CTBT is not without flaws, but it is a task largely accomplished. We now need to move forward. We must decide which way, and how. Both you, Sir, and Secretary-General Petrovsky have displayed remarkable initiative. You have endeavoured through your non-papers to point to the possible directions. You have sought to identify issues and priorities of delegations and groups. You have tried to balance several ideas. Doubtless, these will be discussed and debated. Nevertheless, for your attempts, we are in your debt. We would like you to know that no well-intentioned effort is ever wasted. We also welcome the steps several States have taken, as we have heard today, to buttress the mores of an arms-free or, at least, a less dangerous world.

The CD's abiding link with the Decalogue is beyond dispute. The Decalogue is not just its frame of reference, but also the definer of its content. Yet we know that change is one of nature's most fundamental laws. The world is in constant flux. One never steps into the same River Rhone twice. All things will evolve and perhaps alter, as will, indeed, the Decalogue. But perceptible changes must be preceded by intense consultations. These must be effected on the basis of agreement. New items for consideration should only follow such understanding, and there must be consistency with the Decalogue.

That being said, it is our view that the Conference needs a clear work programme. It should set the priorities for 1997 and the modalities for negotiating thereon. Ours is the sole negotiating forum on disarmament. The luxury of deliberations and items, however intricately politically balanced, is sadly not for us to indulge in. Our work programmes must entail the establishment of ad hoc groups with negotiating mandates. One cannot take up all issues at once. Only one or two can be identified for such focus. Others can be left for plenary deliberations in preparation for future negotiations. We believe that the idea that a single ad hoc committee can take up more than one issue within the spectrum of nuclear disarmament merits examination.

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

Nuclear disarmament is an unambiguous priority for the Group of 21. It has repeatedly called for the establishment of an ad hoc group with a negotiating mandate for this purpose. The Ambassador of Egypt referred to the 28 CD members last year tabling a phased programme for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Bangladesh was party to that event. General and complete disarmament is in our Constitution. It is in our values. It is in our ethos. Our commitment to this aspiration, if not goal, is unflinching. That was the reason behind our joining the formalization of the indefinite expansion of the NPT. That was what inspired our signing of the CTBT despite its shortcomings and the least developed countries' concerns regarding financial obligations. The extension of the NPT and the CTBT were events that now lead to the logical goal, that is, the commencement of negotiations for the elimination of all nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth.

I must add, however, that your list contains items Bangladesh has no hesitation to discuss. The cutting off of fissile material is one such item. But this could be within the broad context of nuclear disarmament as envisaged in the phased programme proposed by the 28 members. However, my delegation does not fight shy of other issues. Ours is a peaceful country with most peaceful intentions. We shall do all that is possible to protect ourselves, to preserve peace in our region, and to bring stability in the world. We know for certain that there is no delegation with wishes to the contrary. But the manner in which we go about our business must be agreed upon, and this should conform to established priorities.

Nuclear disarmament is not an idea that is new. The time to address it with utmost seriousness has surely come. We must do it, all of us, together. There is a saying in our part of the world: "There is not much point in a flock of sheep passing resolutions in favour of vegetarianism if the leopards remain of a different opinion." We are aware that your task is not an easy one. Nor is ours. Yet Gordian knots have been cut before. We are confident that our endeavours will lead to fruition. My delegation will cooperate in every possible way.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of Bangladesh for his statement and kind words. Now I give the floor to the representative of Belgium, Mr. Peeters.

Mr. PEETERS (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. President, since my delegation is speaking at this session for the first time, allow me first of all to congratulate you on taking up the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in discharging your functions and, from the very start of our work, wish to assure you of the full and complete support of the Belgian delegation.

I am taking the floor briefly before the Conference today in order to pass on a few ideas concerning anti-personnel mines, since some delegations have already addressed this issue. At the outset of this session my delegation wishes to make its contribution in order to dispel any ambiguity about this important matter. The recent adoption of resolution 51/45 S at the last United Nations General Assembly testifies to the firm commitment of the

(Mr. Peeters, Belgium)

international community to act and showed that a broad consensus has now emerged in favour of a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines.

The major issue of concern to us all today is how can we bring about this ban at an early date. Since the outset Belgium has played an active part in the process initiated in Ottawa. This is why Belgium has put itself forward as a candidate to organize the follow-up conference in Brussels in June 1997. But as I have just said, certain countries have recently expressed the wish that the preparation of this treaty should be entrusted to the Conference on Disarmament in order to involve a maximum number of States.

Belgium wishes to emphasize that in its view the two methods of work are perfectly compatible, as long as they are mutually supportive and complementary, or, in other words, as long as each approach is a constructive approach. Both forums have their own advantages. It is true that the Conference on Disarmament has its merits and it has a universal calling. Belgium fully recognizes that the Conference on Disarmament may be brought in in the future, to devise a verification system, for instance. However, we must at all costs avoid a situation in which the work through one process, whatever it may be, slows down or hampers efforts that are being pursued elsewhere. This would make the final goal more remote. And even if each process has its own way of dealing with the issue, our objective remains the same: a comprehensive and universal ban on anti-personnel mines. Hence the importance for my country of the process started in Ottawa, whose objective remains unchanged: secure at an early date a treaty banning anti-personnel mines.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Belgium for his statement and kind words. I think that this concludes my list of speakers for today. Unless there are any delegations wishing to take the floor, I suggest that we move on to the next item.

As I informed you at the beginning of this meeting, I shall now take up for decision the requests for participation as observers in our work during 1997 received from Nepal and Armenia. These requests are contained in document CD/WP.480, which is before you. May I take it that the Conference agrees to these requests?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: As you are aware, intensive consultations are still under way with a view to developing a consensus on the agenda and organization of work of the Conference for its current session. I have put forward a proposal on the annual agenda which I believe could form a basis for our consideration in this regard. The statements made in the plenary on Tuesday 21 January and today also provided us with valuable guidance which will hopefully contribute to the consensus-building process on the agenda and programme of work. It is my intention to further intensify our consultations, on a different dimension, in order to bring about agreement on the agenda, organization of the work and of the modalities of negotiations as soon as possible so that we may embark on our substantive work. For this purpose, I

(The President)

intend, with your concurrence, to hold a series of informal plenaries, the first of which will be held next Tuesday, 28 January at 10 a.m. in this room.

Ambassador Tarmidzi of Indonesia has the floor.

Mr. TARMIDZI (Indonesia): Since this is the first time that I take the floor in the plenary under your presidency, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to extend congratulations on your assumption. Of course, a more proper address will be done at an appropriate time. I am asking for the floor to convey the preference of the Group of 21, of which Indonesia is at present the Coordinator, that the informal plenary be held on Thursday, rather than on Tuesday, for the simple and practical reason that the weekly consultations amongst the Group are on Wednesday.

Mr. RAMAKER (Netherlands): Thank you very much for giving me the floor, and I also, on my part, congratulate you with your function as President of the Conference on Disarmament. Being President of this Conference in the month that it starts its work is not an easy task, as was also mentioned this morning, and let me just tell you that my delegation fully supports you in your efforts.

You mentioned in your remarks just now the programme of bilateral consultations you are engaged in, and we, I think, as I also made clear on behalf of the Western Group, encourage you in pursuing that process. We have urgent tasks before us. We are eager, and I think this goes for all of us, to take up concrete work as soon as possible. I find this one of the encouraging signs coming out of the consultations that are being held on a weekly basis under your guidance at the moment, and I think that is good. We are all united in the desire to take up concrete work as soon as possible.

So I know that I speak on behalf of my Group when I say that we welcome your initiative to start a series of informal plenaries in order to tackle the issues that are before us. I think that is a helpful additional instrument in our efforts to agree on the early commencement of concrete work. I also welcome - and I think this is in the spirit also of my Group, although we would have preferred that we could start today - it is, of course, your prerogative to make another proposal, as you did, for practical reasons, and as I understand it, to give time to delegations, if they wish, and groups to consult. Now, I fully understand the need for delegations to get instructions and also, of course, for groups, if they so wish, to meet. But I just wonder - and, of course, it's only a question - whether it would be possible to consider, given the urgency to start work as soon as possible - actually this part of the session will last something like two and a half months, and we would like to make full use of the time allotted to us - would it be possible if groups - and I think that for my own Group that would be, of course, to be proposed to them as well - would it be possible that groups would meet a little earlier so that, for instance, we could honour your request and have an informal plenary, the first one this coming Tuesday? It is just a suggestion and an appeal, as I said, given the urgency of the task. Of course, the whole mechanism of informal plenaries is also meant to give all delegations the opportunity to give their views on the issues that we have

(Mr. Ramaker, Netherlands)

before us and, precisely, it is a useful instrument in addition, as I said to you, bilateral consultations in addition to the weekly consultations. So it is just a suggestion, if you wish, that maybe we could see and try whether we could consider speeding up the process a little bit.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for your comments and proposals. I now give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. WANG (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor. We would like to congratulate you warmly on taking up the presidency of the first session of the CD this year. I would also like to reserve an opportunity for my Ambassador to offer you his formal congratulations on your assumption of the presidency. At the same time I would like to stress that my delegation will cooperate fully with you to promote the work of the CD.

Regarding the matter of an informal plenary of the CD, first of all we would like to thank you for your proposal. We will seek instructions as quickly as possible. This would not have been a complicated matter. However, this year we have a new situation. In other words, this arrangement of an informal plenary proposed by you actually cannot follow the same procedure that the CD has followed in the past in its normal work. The CD had its formal organizational arrangement in its normal work in the past. Under those circumstances, the matter of informal arrangements was in fact only a procedural matter and it was not complicated. However, this year the situation is different. On the matter of an informal plenary, I am afraid the format, the topics and the timing of such a plenary should be considered in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Of course this is only the view of the Chinese delegation. Your proposal has its merits and defects and it also constitutes a precedent which will have a bearing on the future work of the CD. Therefore naturally we can understand that certain delegations or certain groups require time to think this over. Proceeding from this standpoint, the Chinese delegation thinks that the proposal by the Indonesian delegation on behalf of the Group of 21 that the informal plenary should be held on Thursday is a reasonable suggestion. The Chinese delegation fully agrees with this suggestion.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from French): Mr. President, as my delegation, both in the Group of 21 as well as at the last plenary, was one of those which wanted to have informal consultations in order to try and foster progress, I cannot but support you and congratulate you on your proposal. I think that things are much simpler. Your initiative is a very good one and in my view we could have initial consultations, as you suggest, on Tuesday, to see how we are going to proceed. In any case my delegation has no instructions on a number of points, but that will not prevent me from listening to you, listening to other delegations and reporting back to my authorities on the positions expressed on a number of topics and on your paper. I know that we in the G.21 wish to consult on these matters, but I will only be able to embark on consultations with the members of the G.21 once my own delegation has instructions, and I have none as yet. I think that in order to move things forward, we could - and I am not at all contradicting

(Mr. Benjelloun-Touimi, Morocco)

our Coordinator, Ambassador Tarmidzi, when I say that it is simply a question of getting started and giving a hearing to you and others without adopting specific positions - I don't see why we shouldn't do that.

Mr. LEDOGAR (United States of America): It was my understanding that rule 19, suggesting that there should be consensus before there is a particular format agreed upon, referred to meetings on substance. I am frankly rather surprised that on a procedural matter, which is what I understand you have in mind in suggesting informal plenaries, rule 19 would be invoked. What is going to happen if we have group meetings on Wednesday, and at those meetings some members tell their group coordinators that they don't have instructions yet? Then we come back on Thursday and we hear that, well, there's no consensus within a particular group to hold an informal plenary next Thursday, and so on. Instructions on substance are understandable, but to get together to talk about procedure, our agenda, and that that requires prior consensus within a group, I find rather extraordinary. But if it is the case, then I wonder if you could not, instead of convoking informal plenaries, accomplish the same procedural mission by calling for an open-ended bureau meeting.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you very much for your comments. Rule 19 reads: "The work of the Conference shall be conducted in plenary meetings, as well as under any additional arrangements agreed by the Conference, such as informal meetings with or without experts." And then rule 22: "The Conference may hold informal meetings, with or without experts, to consider as appropriate substantive matters, as well as questions concerning its organisation of work". It is my understanding - well, before going further, there is a request from the Ambassador of Indonesia.

Mr. TARMIDZI (Indonesia): Thank you for giving me the floor again and I apologise for that. Although you have explained earlier that the informal meeting should in no way reflect the views of groups, our Group thinks that even though that was the case, I think it would be helpful if, at the informal consultations, the national positions of each individual country, when they're reflected, have already been consulted within the Groups. This, I think, is the intention of the proposal coming from the Group of 21. I know that we are all at your discretion. And I think also that when you mention rule 19 and rule 22, we are not going only to discuss procedural matters, but also substantive matters, and this is what we are concerned about.

Mr. BERDENNIKOV (Russian Federation) (translated from Russian): Mr. President, I too would like to congratulate you first of all on your appointment as President of the Conference and wish you every success including in the matter that we are now discussing, the organization of the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, as I understand it, there are no disagreements among the members of the Conference as to whether or not we should hold informal meetings. I haven't heard anybody object to this form of work. What is at issue here is simply when such meetings should be held, whether on Tuesday or Thursday. I do not consider that this is a fundamental issue. And if a group of delegations, supported by another very important delegation, prefers to hold such a meeting on Thursday, then why can't we, in a spirit of compromise

(Mr. Berdennikov, Russian Federation)

and of course without any prejudice to the urgency of our work and the importance of this work, go along with that and agree that, indeed, there will be an informal meeting of the Conference, but on Thursday. I don't think that such a decision would do any harm to the work of the Conference - on the contrary, we would be taking a step forward, even if only a small one.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of the Russian Federation. Well, I thank, once again, various Ambassadors for their comments and I have duly taken note of them. Of course, under the authority of the President, the President can convene at any time an informal consultation of the whole. However, in order to give more weight to and in order to conduct more organized, presumably more productive, discussions, I would suggest that the informal plenary would be better. But convening informal consultations in informal plenary does not mean that I cease to carry on my bilateral and multilateral consultations which I have been carrying out these weeks, let alone the weekly Presidential consultations. On this understanding, I suggest that there is general agreement that the informal plenaries will start on Thursday, 30 January 1997 at 10 a.m., immediately after the plenary of the Conference.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): I have no problem with your suggestion and, of course, it is always nice to be able to consult with colleagues from the same group, but my proposal is rather of another nature. Is it a requirement to have the plenary meeting on Thursday? Why don't we move the plenary meeting to Tuesday and have the informal meeting on Thursday? I really think that if there are many speakers at the plenary, little time will be left to consider the issues of the agenda. Around 12 o'clock I don't think we can seriously start talking about the agenda, which is a very important business. So, although I appreciate what has been said and your ruling, I think this is not the way to conduct our business, because we all know that we suffered from speech fatigue before, and that we have to take that into account.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Ambassador Benjelloun-Touimi. With your understanding I will come back to this particular point you have raised as to whether the CD can skip the plenary on Thursday.

Is there general agreement that informal plenaries will start on Thursday, immediately after the plenary when we will have the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Foreign Minister of Australia as visitors? Is it understood?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: The next plenary meeting will be held on Thursday, 30 January at 10 a.m., to be immediately followed by an informal plenary. As you know, on this occasion, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia, the Honourable Alexander Downer, will address the Conference, and I would therefore kindly request all of you to be present at 10 a.m. sharp in view of the heavy schedules of these two distinguished visitors.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.